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ABSTRACT

This study promotes the natural world as a resource for personal growth. It stresses how nature may help individuals build responsible and fulfilling relationships and offers sensory activities which show how nature can lead people to emotional health by teaching them its "non-language communication." Once participants identify and differentiate their "natural-sensory" and cognitive "language-reasoning" ways of knowing, a coloring task is presented. This task challenges them to express in words their natural sensory knowledge. The task induces stress which disappears when a new kind of language is introduced -- a language which validates a person's sensory way of knowing. This paper analyzes the dynamics of this transaction and examines the technique's implications for stress management and mental health. Also offered are unique, nature-connecting activities which are believed to reduce stress. These nature-connecting activities are then analyzed for their mental health and environmental effects. (RJM)

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Counseling and Nature: A Greening of Psychotherapy

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ABSTRACT

This study identifies the natural world as a exceptional resource for learning how to build responsible relationships and it offers sensory activities that let nature teach its wise and balanced ways. Once participants identify and differentiate their "natural-sensory" and cognitive "language-reasoning" ways of knowing, a coloring task challenges them to express in words their natural sensory knowledge. The task induces stress which disappears when language is introduced that validates their sensory way of knowing. This paper observes the dynamics of this transaction and examines its stress management and mental health implications, It offers unique nature connecting activities that reduce stress and reports their mental health and environmental effects.

TEXT

Who responsibly counsels counselors? Do we promote sanity if we teach our clients to support and depend upon an irresponsible society? This study describes a working model that teaches us to enjoyably and responsibly create personal, social and environmental balance. The model sits before our eyes, yet we seldom see it.

Since 1959 I have constantly lived, learned and taught in natural areas, the places Thoreau called "A civilization other than our own". That civilization taught me how to let its "magic" psychologically counsel people. I discovered and use counseling activities that let Earth itself teach its integrity, a wisdom joy and beauty that excludes pollution, war and insanity. This was not difficult to learn once I recognized that as natural beings we are born with these attributes.

The natural world taught me to identify and validate the integrity of its non-languaged sensory relationships. I collect, design and, in my university training manual *Well Mind, Well Earth,* offer 97 unique nature-connecting activities. By affording tangible contact with the natural world and creation processes, the activities let nature itself, in backyards or back country, share its secrets with anyone, anywhere, anytime. (Cohen 1994). The process (Cohen 1993) involves learning nature's non-languaged communication. That idea threatens some of people, but not all. For example, Vice-President of the United States Albert Gore included the award-winning *Connecting With Nature* (Cohen 1990) part of my training manual in his book *Earth In Balance* and I recently received the Distinguished World Citizen award for this work.

The natural world produces no garbage. On a macro level, everything is valued, nothing is discarded or unwanted and that defines unconditional love in action. Scientifically validating nature's unconditional love and its effects helps empower us to enjoy it.

We, as part of life, inherit the natural world's integrity as our inner nature, a profound globally shared creation blueprint which too often we, demeaningly, call "The little child within

us"(Cohen, 1993B). True education is to learn to read that blueprint, to draw it out from within and learn to resonate with it, validate it and support its integrity. Instead, to our cost, we often learn to conquer it within and about us. Reading the blueprint connects us to our common origins, that we might start anew to co-create a truly civilized society rather than become even more personally and socially "bewildered" (nature-separated). This article teaches . It offers critical thinking tools and activities that enable counselors to reads the blueprint. Appropriately, the tools come from modern knowledge, from experiences with today's problems and relationships (Knapp, 1988), not from those of other times, environments and cultures. They let contact with natural systems teach us how to enjoyably walk in balance. Counselors, educators and interpreters increasingly use these tools to reverse apathy, stress and dysfunction.

Nature seldom sustains itself by using "techno" logic -meaning "A thinking logic that creates artificial stories and techniques". Instead, the natural world uses "bio" logic. Bio-logic consists of being multisensory, of heeding each moment's natural attractions that call to our inner nature through our more than 53 genetically inherited, but culturally denied, natural senses and feelings. These feelings are ancient, globally evolved memory signals, multisensory ways of knowing and being for harmonious survival. For example, not only is water a vital foundation of life, so, equally, is our natural survival sense and feeling of thirst. Thirst is a sentient biological memory that re-connects us land animals to water and survival. The feeling makes bio-logic sense as do each of our 52 other natural senses. Although we seldom describe it as such, most counseling is *multisensory learning*, a sensing or re-sensing (remembering) one or more natural sensations along with their degree of integration, fulfillment or frustration.

Too often our techno-logic words and stories exclude our natural sensory wisdom. Each word, story or moment that doesn't bring to awareness our natural sensory interconnectedness further separates us from the support of nature's multisensory integrity. (Cohen 1994).

An account by Rodney Romney exemplifies how multisensory, experiences with the natural world sensibly modify human behavior: In Scotland, farmers were overturning their hay

bales to exterminate rats that lived beneath them. A trio of rats tried to flee but, unlike the other fleeing rats, these three stayed closely together which limited their ability to escape. Upon investigation, the farmers found that the middle rat of the three was blind; its companions were guiding it to safety. Deeply moved, the farmers did not kill these rats.

The farmers responded to many natural senses and feelings including consciousness, sight, nurturing, place, curiosity, hunger, motion, trust, empathy, sound, compassion, community and reason. We sometimes call this human *morality*, *values* or *being humane*, but these words separate us from a truth of nature. They hide that these senses are nature expressing itself, for natural senses are solely of, by and from the natural world. Note that the rats "morally" responded to the same group of senses and have done so for millions of years before humanity evolved. We observe similar animal and plant behavior throughout the natural world. However, our culturally ingrained, prejudicial anti-nature stories prevent us from saying the farmers acted naturally, like rats, pigs or fungi.

Many researchers validate that psychologically and physiologically, a human being's inner nature consists of a variety of distinct, different natural sensations (Cohen, 1994; Murchie, 1978; Pearce, 1980; Rivlin & Gravelle1984; Rovee-Collier, 1992; Samples, 1976; Stevens, 1993; Spelke, 1992; Wynne-Edwards, 1991). They include additional senses like color, thirst, language, smell, taste, consciousness, excretion, belonging, space, distance, form, temperature and touch. Each is unique. Note that reasoning, language and consciousness are natural senses that serve a survival function in nature. In some form and intensity, each sense pervades the natural world including our inner nature.

During the Spring of 1993, World Peace University Department of Integrated Ecology instructors and associates completed an informal study of 167 Washington State residents, mostly aged 16-51, of differing occupations (Cohen, 1993A). Our object was to determine if we could demonstrate the effects of assigning false words and labels to a person's sensory inner nature.

We did this by asking the study participants "When did you first learn to know the color Green? Participants responses fell into two main categories.

A. Some participants remembered when they learned to associate the word *green* with their green color sensation, thereby knowing green by its name or label. For example: "I remember that my parents told me that the name for the color of the grass and trees was *green*."

B. Some participants recognized that they naturally registered green (greenness) as a sense or sensation at birth or before: For example "Like many other species, I was biologically born knowing green. It is a God thing. I could naturally sense and distinguish the green grass from the blue sky even though at the time, I didn't know the names of their colors."

We know green in two ways: by the biological, inborn natural color sense (sensitivity) to green (greenness) and by the word-symbol *green* which labels that sensitivity. However, consider the following findings of the study:

When Carol was an infant learning to talk, her father, an experimental psychologist, used her as an experiment. He purposely taught her that the name for the color green was *orange* and the name for orange was *green*. Today she is 34 years old and still gets confused when naming these colors. She still tends to call orange *green* and green *orange*. Carol often "thinks about" and "figures out" the correct terms for these colors rather than automatically knowing them. Sometimes she feels stupid and stressed for having to do so. We found several participants who had similar experiences.

We asked each of our study participants to verbally call upon their inner nature, their inborn, non-language, natural sense of color, to express itself, to do its natural "inner child" thing. The vehicle we used for this purpose is the list of color names found in figure 1. The words naming the colors were written in different colored inks (for example, the word "*brown*" was

written in yellow ink). Participants were asked to quickly go down the color chart list and say aloud the ink colors, not the color names. For example, the first color is red, not orange.

ORANGE	-color in with red ink
RED	-color in with purple ink
BLUE	-color in with black ink
BLACK	-color in with blue ink
BROWN	-color in with yellow ink
YELLOW	-color in with green ink
PINK	-color in with orange ink
GREEN	-color in with green ink

Figure 1

As a control for this task, we asked participants to quickly identify blocks of identical ink colors that we painted on a separate page.

When using figure 1, although practically every participant had no difficulty labeling blocks of ink colors, most participants had difficulty quickly identifying the same ink colors when they spelled out words. The overwhelming tendency was for participant's culturally trained sense of language to dominate and, out of habit, or "word addiction" read the colors as words rather than as colors. In addition, when doing this activity quickly, over 40% of the participants "deluded" in that they spoke a written color name aloud but actually believed they had said the ink color. For

example, in the fifth item in figure 1, Paul believed he had read the ink color correctly even though he said the word "brown" while seeing the color yellow. If another person had had not been with him and caught the the error, Paul would not have known that he made it. It's similar to you, the reader, perhaps not noticing that the words "the" and "had" were doubled in the previous sentence until I now alert you to this fact. The difference is that Paul lost awareness of a vital sensory signal from his inner nature, not simply a typographical error. Participants concluded "My trained habitual dependency on using words overwhelmed my natural sensory inner child, an important, loving natural part of myself. I had trouble expressing my natural ability to recognize green in a non-language way." One participant offered: "I love nature yet I have a hard time loving myself. This helps explain why."

Participants never experienced "difficulty," "tension," "conflict" or "stress" on the last word on the color chart, the word green written in green ink. In all cases, *Green* written in green ink felt more relaxing than did the other color words.

Old-brain and New Brain Thinking

From early in our lives, our formal and informal education excessively conditions us to bring the sensory world into our awareness by labeling it with language abstractions -words, symbols and images- and validating the reasonable meanings of these abstractions. Usually two different natural sense groups lying in two different parts of the brain are at work when we "know" something natural like the color green (Samples 1976):

The Old-brain: Our natural sense of color lying in the large, anciently evolved "old-brain" enables us to experience color as an unlabeled, non-verbal sensation or feeling. The old-brain registers non-language tensions, sensations, feelings and emotions. It makes up approximately 87% of the brain and is the home of 51 naturally pervasive sense groups, some of which I have mentioned. Most of our old brain sensitivities we inherit from and share with the plant and animal kingdoms (Cohen, 1994,1993, Murchie 1978). These natural senses are facts as real as rocks, oceans and gravity; our desire to breathe is as much a property of air as is the wind on our cheek.

In multisensory concert natural senses make the "natural sense" that is nature's beauty, peace and wisdom. In the natural environment they provide a non-language, interspecies attraction communion. This communion permits natural systems to act sensibly as a *community*, "to make common sense," "work by consensus," to organize, preserve and regenerate themselves responsibly, intelligently and diversely without producing garbage, war, or insanity (Cohen 1994).

The New-brain: Our 2 senses of language and reason lie in our small, more recently evolved, "new-brain" the *cerebral neocortex*. These two senses learn to know greenness as the culturally correct word or label (like the word "green") for sensory experiences. The new-brain makes up about 13% of the total brain. It creates, experiences, validates and processes culturally trained symbolism: language, letters, words, numbers, drawings, logic, abstractions and stories. Society teaches us to mostly think and reason in new-brain symbols and stories, be they accurate or inaccurate, destructive or constructive, limited or wide-ranged.

Summary and discussion of Part One.

From early in our lives, the ancient sense of color, lying in the old-brain, enables us to naturally register green color as a sensation. This sense experiences green directly as "greenness", as a non-language, unadulterated, unedited, unmediated sensation and feeling experience. The old brain brings to awareness how we feel and is often called our inner nature, inner self or is misnamed our inner child. When we operate from the old brain, in western culture we often say we are being *emotional, sensitive, childlike, feelingful, intuitive, subjective, inexperienced, flaky, illiterate,* or *overreactive.* However, Carl Jung and many others note, "Our feelings are not only reasonable, the are as discriminating, logical and consistent as abstract thinking." Natural senses and feelings are the foundations of bïo-logic, of nature's civilization which can best be unprejudicially measured by its long term survival effects.

In the small more recently evolved new-brain, the cerebral neocortex, Western culture often trains the senses of language and reason to apply cultural words, labels or stories to the natural senses. We teach the new brain that it is reasonable to know greenness as the written or

spoken word *green*, or *verde* (Spanish) or *vert* (French) or other words in different languages and cultures. When we operate from senses of language and reason we say we are *literate, cerebral, sensible, abstract, cognitive, reasonable, logical, educated* or *thoughtful.*

Most of the study participants were unaware that a cause of their inability to express their inner nature is that the average American spends over 95% of his or her life indoors. Studies indicate that we spend almost 18,000 critical developmental childhood hours in classrooms alone. Collectively, we spend less than one day per person per lifetime in tune with the non-languaged natural world. We live over 98% of our nature-estranged adult lives abstractly knowing the natural world through detached words and stories about it rather than through intimate enjoyment of it. My observations outdoors tell me that our estrangement from nature restricts our natural sensory connections from growing and strengthening from natural connections with the natural world. This disconnects us from the wisdom, spirit and peace of the nature and creation. Conversely, when I've connected people to natural areas, their problem solving abilities and harmonic relationships have increased dramatically (Cohen, 1994).

In America, the stressful anger, anxiety and sadness catalyzed by our overlooked or rejected natural feelings depresses us. It fuels our problems at every level. We are not islands. As we remain estranged from the wisdom, spirit and unconditional love of the natural world in ourselves, others and natural areas, our negative social and environmental indicators rise. Even outdoor education that does not teach us how to daily validate and fulfill our inner nature's right to be connected, loved and nurtured, does not resolve these problems (Cohen 1993).

Part Two

Recommendations: The use of nature-reconnection activities.

The color chart activity is one of 97 *Well Mind, Well Earth* nature-connecting activities used by counselors, educators and mental health workers to catalyze *Green* in green. The pioneering ecopsychology experiences counteract the adverse effects of the estrangement of our

53 natural senses from the natural world (Goldman, 1993). In classrooms, counseling programs, environmental education, mental health facilities, nature interpretation and recovery work the activities help teach the new-brain to discover, validate and respect the old-brain and its sensory connections to nature's wisdom, to part of creation's higher power (Cohen, 1993, 1994). The activities move participants. Even when participants learn the activities from our intercultural Internet Email courses or our training manuals, we see significant improvement in their self-esteem for they discover that nature's perfection outside themselves flourishes within them. Nature-connecting lets the natural world teach us to revere nature in ourselves, others and the environment and we refrain from hurting that which we hold sacred. This is the new frontier for counseling psychology. With over 70% of the nation suffering from stress and environmental deterioration continuing, counseling with nature holds a key to our destiny.

The following 6 activities introduce the nature-connecting process of our 97 additional activities (Cohen, 1994A). We reinforce each of them through journalizing and critically assessing the thoughts, feelings and reactions arising from them.

Activity 1. Natural Old-Brain Connecting: In order to strengthen your non-languaged inner nature (for example, your old-brain sense of color), go to a real natural area (a park, backyard, terrarium, potted plant or wilderness, -not a tape, picture or video). For five minutes minimum, without using language or reason, try to connect your non-languaged, sensory inner nature with the non-languaged natural world. Do this by simply sensing natural attractions there (colors, moods, textures, motions, forms, variations, tastes, smells, sounds, atmospheres etc.) without assigning terms, words or ideas to the experience. This is non-verbal old-brain connecting. It's important and it's a challenge. As you find your mind habitually or addictively drifts to language thoughts or to labeling the natural area, block it from doing so by repeating the word "non-languaged" "one" or "unity" over and over again as you sense the area.. That further connects your non-languaged awareness to this moment with nature. Try to more intensely and

completely multisense each moment. Moving through the area without concentrating on any one thing also helps you make non-verbal contact.

Activity 2. Validating Natural Connecting: Repeat Activity 1 and label (new-brain connect to) the natural attractions that call to you. Do this by labeling the natural connecting process, not the objects themselves. Focus on the whole of the natural attraction experience, rather than just the attractive natural object or atmosphere, by calling each attraction *a nature-connection experience.* For example, if a leaf attracts you, call the leaf attraction *an attractive sensory connection with the leaf.* If a bird's color, motion, distance, beauty or song attracts you, also call it *a nature-connecting experience.* Other sensory terms that participants have used to describe these natural sensory connection-attraction experiences include: *loves, attractions, feelings, spirits, sensations, intuitions, bonds, callings, resonances, affinities, Higher Power, blessings, affections, natural wisdoms, joys, ambiance, God, devas, sensory facts,* etc. Each of these sensory connection terms correctly identifies our experience (*Green* in green) when a natural attraction calls to us. The terms feelingly bring the natural sensory connection process into reasonable new-brain language awareness. This process enables the new-brain to begin to consciously make sense, register and validate the existence of many natural sensory connections as well as how they feel.

Activity 3. Natural Attractions Feel Good:(Cohen, 1993B, 1994) While in a natural area, repeat Activity 2 with the following addition: Notice that each time you connectively sense a natural attraction it feels comfortable (enjoyable, good, nice, fun, beautiful, supportive etc.). Validate this bio-logic experience and your sensory self by putting it into words (new-brain) such as "I am a person who enjoys sensing natural attractions." or "Natural attractions make me feel good." Recognize that this validation is like writing *Green* in green ink. In the new-brain it produces a reasonable languaged consciousness of enjoyable natural sensations and feelings eminating from attraction connections with the natural world.

Activity 4. Integrating: While in a natural area, read aloud the validations you wrote in Activity 3. Note that you feel comfortable reading and writing your validation; you enjoy seeing or hearing in language (new-brain) what is valid and true about your sensory inner nature (old-brain natural senses) and their connectedness to the natural world. That's *Green* in green, techno-logic validating bio-logic. Now validate your enjoyment. When it feels comfortable and makes sense to you, write and/or say to the effect that "It feels good for my new-brain to validate my old-brain's sensory nature and its connective sensitivity to natural attractions." "I am aware that I gain enjoyment by letting my reasoning-language abilities validate my inner nature and its connections with the natural world." These validations also feel good because they are "*Green* in green." They integrate our total being, our languaged and non-languaged ways of knowing and being. They also give added value to natural areas.

Activity 5. Being Open: Learn to let nature guide you. Trust its attractiveness. For eons it has shown that its unconditional love knows how to harmoniously build community and beauty. Go to a natural area. Be open to its callings by following the natural attractions there that spontaneously attract you, rather than by seeking attractions you expect to find there. Your new-brain choice to do this thoughtfully, respectfully permits and enables nature within and around you to take the lead, to momentarily guide you That is natural wisdom in action. It naturally connects your new-brain with immediate attractive "loving" callings from Earth to your inner nature's readiness and desire to help create and sustain nature's responsible harmony. You discover that your immediate natural attractions often differ from the attractions in your preconceived new-brain story. They also change with your inner nature's moods and needs moment by moment. Once you discover any moment's natural attraction, repeat activities 2-4. They safely increase your new-brain's awareness of sensory messages that your inner nature has shown it is ready to enjoy.

Personal discomfort usually symptomizes "green in orange", inner-nature disconnetedness, real or imagined. Too often in today's stressful world we take stress for granted.

For this reason, if we don't make efforts to be aware of how we feel and to choose to responsibly and safely find good feelings, we seldom experience them. You can naturally find them and supportive relationships by connecting with nature in people and places.

Activity 6. Summarizing: Write down what for you are the three most important things you learned by doing these activities.

The following 2 anecdotes summarize the process of connecting with nature:

Once Sandy validated that she could gain good feelings and reverse depression by following her natural attractions, she made a conscious effort to become fully involved in that process, For years she shunned walking up the beautiful moss-covered rock faces that called to her. She thought they were too steep, wet and slippery, that story made them unattractive. But on this day, because decided that she deserved to have good feelings, she followed her attractions to the beauty and other attractive callings of the rocks: their color, height, space, form and texture. Moment by moment she sought the most attractive next step across the rocks. With surprise and elation, easily climbed them. She then described her fun experience and how nice it felt. Describing it felt good, and her companions enjoyed hearing her talk about the experience, and knowing her joy. Sandy is learning to achieve this same result by following her multisensory attractions to her friends' inner nature.

"Applied ecopsychology activities create thoughtful nature-connected moments. In these enjoyable non-language instants as many as 53 inborn natural attraction senses safely awaken, play and intensify. Additional activities immediately validate and strengthen each sensation. This emotionally empowering process connects, fulfills and renews our inner nature with the natural world's beauty, wisdom and peace. We feel rejuvenated, more colorful and thankful and these feelings give us support. They nurture us, they satisfy our deepest natural wants. As we satisfy these wants we remove the stress and dependencies that fuel our

disorders. The process triggers green critical thinking that values sensory relationships. It regenerates natural connections and community within ourselves, others and the land. We become more knowledgeable, more environmentally and socially responsible. We feel better." (Cohen, 1994A)

Conclusions and effects

New brain language-reason disconnections from the natural world and our sentient inner nature make it difficult for us to fully experience and express natural feelings. Disconnected and unfulfilled, our inner nature feels stress and lackluster causing us to excessively crave natural sensations or depend upon artificial, excessive and irresponsible, substitutes for them. Sensory nature-connecting activities have shown to help reverse this phenomenon by offering safe, responsible, natural fulfillments. When used in conjunction with counseling and education, the activities enjoyably connect participants to nature's vitality spirit and wisdom (Cohen 1994B). The following events have resulted from participants in our applied ecopsychology courses and workshops using the activities:

A participant who preached that people should express their natural feelings discovered that his preaching was philosophically replacing his personal expression and integration of feeling. Local natural areas became a springboard for him to let himself, to be more feelingful, self-expressive and involved in stronger relationships.

Participants with migraine or other headaches learned to discover, fulfill and validate her natural attractions in natural areas and people. Her headaches disappeared.

A participant who for 57 years had chewed his nails, effortlessly stopped doing so, achieving gain without pain.

Participants learned to identify which of their natural senses had been injured. With this knowledge, by following their attractions in natural areas, they learned to support and in time soothe their sensory injuries.

Participants found that after learning to validate their sensory attraction contacts in a natural area, they could ask personal and philosophical questions of the area, and receive responsible answers as well as guiding emotional energies that they trusted. This process also enabled them to be aware of how they felt at any given moment and how to feel more comfortable if they wanted to.

Participants found that through the sensory fulfillment and support they received from natural areas, they could choose not to participate in those parts of society whose long-term effects were destructive.

Participants discovered that they could use sensory connections to natural areas and people's inner nature as common ground in discussions thereby avoiding the polarization, arguments and aggravation of paradigm gaps.

Participants learned to enjoyably relate to nature in people with the same beauty, ease and trust as they had to attractive plants, animals and minerals in natural areas.

One suicidal participant found the strength and purpose to remain alive by establishing sensory connections with a small tree in her backyard.

Counselors found that couples using nature-connecting activities were able to find common ground that bridged gaps and problems that ordinarily disrupted their relationships.

Counselors found that clients became more trustful and respectful of their feelings and thereby made greater headway in therapy.

Participants refused to let their occupations continue to aggravate their inner nature. They actively improved their work situation or found a more harmonious occupation.

Recovery programs used the nature-connecting activities to have their participants make tangible contact with "Higher Power". This resulted in new freedoms of thought and social independence. Some called the process an "adjunct to prayer", a "thirteenth step".

Participants found a wise, sane and peaceful part of themselves that they always knew existed but that they never learned to reach or validate.

As did the farmers in their relationship with the rats, each of the above participants became more enamored with the natural world and its unconditional love. They also became painfully aware of how we learn to separate from it, to abuse it and ourselves to the cost of our mental and environmental health. Energized by their new multi-sensory connections to nature in people and places, they used bio-logic, they acted to reverse their disconnectedness. The process of counseling with nature offers new hope.

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